

Washington, DC - As Vermont dug out from the season's first major winter snow storm and temperatures plunged below freezing, emergency legislation to provide \$1 billion for home heating assistance was introduced today in the Senate by Senators Bernie Sanders and Patrick Leahy and in the House of Representatives by Congressman Peter Welch.

"Skyrocketing home heating bills already are stretching household budgets," Sanders said. "In the richest country on earth, we have a moral responsibility to make sure that no one has to make a choice between food or medicine or heat for their homes. Congress must act now to deal with this national emergency."

Leahy said, "With the price of oil hovering near \$100 per barrel, Vermonters are facing a 26 percent hike in their heating fuel bills this winter. The Bush administration is turning a blind eye to that harsh reality. Just three weeks ago President Bush vetoed \$2.4 billion in LIHEAP help for struggling families. His veto has contributed to the looming emergency that this bill addresses."

"Vermonters are getting squeezed," Welch said. "The high cost of heating fuel is crippling family budgets and threatens the health and well-being of many of our neighbors already struggling to get by. It is critical that we provide this emergency assistance to Vermonters facing these exorbitant fuel costs."

The *Keep Americans Warm Act of 2007* would provide an additional \$1 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program this winter, when home heating bills for a typical household burning heating oil are projected to total \$2,157, a 47 percent increase from last winter. The National Energy Directors Association estimated propane prices will set the typical household back \$1,765 this winter, 31 percent more than one year ago. Electricity will cost 9 percent more; and natural gas prices were projected to go up by more than 9 percent.

The number of households receiving home heating assistance under the federal and state partnership program increased by 26 percent from 4.6 million in 2003 to about 5.8 million in 2007. During the same period, federal support for the program went up by only 10 percent. As a result, the average grant declined from \$349 to \$305 while energy prices continued to rise. The result has been a significant decrease in the program's purchasing power.

According to the energy assistance directors, states plan to reduce the number of households served by about 15 percent in the absence of additional federal and supplemental state

funding. The result would be a decline in the number of households served from about 5.8 million in 2007 to 4.9 million during the coming year.

Incredibly, President Bush wants to slash \$379 million from the program that provides critical help to 5.8 million senior citizens on fixed-incomes and low-income families with children, including approximately 20,000 households in Vermont.

The Sanders bill has strong bipartisan backing from 22 Senate cosponsors. Welch lined up 12 cosponsors in the House.

The Senate cosponsors are Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.; Joseph R. Biden, D-Del.; Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio; Maria Cantwell, D-Wash.; Robert P. Casey Jr., D-Pa.; Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y.; Norm Coleman, R-Minn.; Susan Collins, R-Maine; John F. Kerry, D-Mass.; Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass.; Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.; Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt.; Joseph I. Lieberman, I-Conn.; Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind.; Robert Menendez, D-N.J.; Barbara A. Mikulski, D-Md.; Barack Obama, D-Ill.; Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y.; Gordon H. Smith, R-Ore.; Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine; John E. Sununu, R-N.H., and Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.

The House cosponsors are Thomas Allen, D-Maine; Joe Courtney, D-Conn.; Donna Christensen, D-Virgin Islands; Keith Ellison, D-Minn.; Phil Hare, D-Ill.; Paul Hodes, D-N.H.; Michael Michaud, D-Maine; Gwen Moore, D-Wis.; Donald Payne, D-N.J.; Carol Shea-Porter, D-N.H.; Mike Ross, D-Ark., and Albert Wynn, D-Md.